

WORKS OF ART FOR THE NEW CAPITOL.

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

COMMUNICATING

Correspondence relative to works of art for the new Capitol.

JULY 7, 1856.—Ordered to be printed.

To the House of Representatives of the United States:

In response to a resolution of the House of Representatives, of the 18th ultimo, requesting me to inform the House "what measures, if any, have been taken to carry out the provisions of a late act of Congress authorizing the President to contract with Hiram Powers (the great American sculptor, now in Italy) for some work of art for the new Capitol, and appropriating twenty-five thousand dollars for that purpose," I transmit, herewith, copies of three letters—one from Mr. Powers to Hon. Edward Everett, and two from myself to the same gentleman.

Since the date of my letter of July 24, 1855, I have communicated with Mr. Everett upon the subject verbally and in writing, and the final proposition, on my part, resulting therefrom, will be found in the accompanying extract of a letter dated June 5, 1856.

FRANKLIN PIERCE.

WASHINGTON, July 3, 1856.

Mr. Powers to Mr. Everett.

FLORENCE, June 5, 1855.

MY DEAR SIR: Having been informed that the President of the United States has been authorized by Congress to contract with me for a work already done, or to be done, for the Capitol, I beg that you will have the kindness, in my unavoidable absence from the country, to represent me in the matter according to your own discretion, and

to consider yourself as hereby authorized to treat with the President, and to do whatever may be proper and necessary in the premises.

With sincere regard, I am, most respectfully yours,

HIRAM POWERS.

Hon. EDWARD EVERETT.

The President to Mr. Everett.

WASHINGTON, July 24, 1855.

MY DEAR SIR: It gratifies me to learn that Mr. Powers has designated you to act for him in carrying into execution the provisions of the 28th section of the civil and diplomatic bill of the last session of Congress. I think the language of the law clearly authorizes the purchase of the statue upon which Mr. Powers has been for several years engaged. The language is very broad—"To enable the President of the United States to contract with Hiram Powers for some work of art, executed or to be executed by him, and suitable for the ornament of the Capitol, a sum not exceeding twenty-five thousand dollars." The main question would seem, therefore, to be, what are the merits of "America?" What is its value? what its suitableness "for the ornament of the Capitol?" Never having seen the work, I must, from the nature of the case, rely upon the representations of those who possess the requisite knowledge and taste to form a correct judgment upon the points suggested. A statement from yourself, and such evidence from others as will enable me to arrive at a conclusion just to the government and to the eminent artist for whom the provision was made, will, of course, be essential. If you have no satisfactory protograph of "America," you will, I think, deem it desirable that one be obtained to accompany the description and testimonials. When you communicate with Mr. Powers, I beg you to assure him that I retain a very pleasant remembrance of the acquaintance which it was my good fortune to form with him many years since, and that, in common with his countrymen, I feel a deep interest in whatever concerns his fame and fortunes.

I am, with the highest respect, very truly, your friend,

FRANKLIN PIERCE.

Hon. EDWARD EVERETT.

The President to Mr. Everett.

[Extract.]

WASHINGTON, June 5, 1856.

DEAR SIR: * * * * * *

There are many positions in the wings of the Capitol, now under construction, which would be appropriate to Mr. Powers' statue of "America," as described by him. I am, however, neither willing nor

able to place a price upon it, and I can only suggest that Mr. Powers offer such work of art, consisting of one or more objects, as his taste and genius may indicate, affixing to such work his own valuation. If offered at satisfactory rates, and found suitable for the ornament of the Capitol, the work will be accepted to the extent of the appropriation made for this purpose. Should any difference of opinion arise between Mr. Powers and myself, I propose that the questions of fitness and value be submitted to the decision of yourself, Hon. Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War, Hon. James A. Pearce, of the United States Senate, Hon. Caleb Cushing, Attorney General of the United States, and W. W. Seaton, esq., of the city of Washington, or of any three of the gentlemen named who may find it convenient to give their attention to the subject.

I regret that various circumstances have conspired to prevent me from giving an earlier answer to your last letter.

With high respect, your friend and servant,

FRANKLIN PIERCE.

Hon. EDWARD EVERETT,
Boston, Mass.

